

Disaster Mitigation and Response Programs for Historic Sites

The National Park Service (NPS) Western, Pacific Northwest, and Rocky Mountain Regional Offices sponsored an international symposium on the Management of Disaster Mitigation and Response Programs for Historic Sites on June 26-28, 1995, at the University of California, Berkeley. The symposium was funded by the Fiscal Year 1995 Cultural Resources Training Initiative, the Historic Preservation Partners for Earthquake Response, who specifically funded the video taping of the symposium, and the registration fee. The symposium was chaired by David W. Look, AIA, NPS.

Over the last several years, the United States has experienced an unprecedented series of disasters: earthquakes, hurricanes, typhoons, tornadoes, floods, landslides, oil spills, and accidents involving other toxic substances, fires, civil disturbances, and terrorists' attacks. Most of these have destroyed or severely damaged archeological and historic sites, including cultural landscapes. During these disasters, many people acquired experience and knowledge in responding to disasters and mitigating damage. The purpose of the symposium was to share this information and those experiences before they were forgotten. The symposium was, however, more than lessons learned from recent disasters.

Each session was initiated by a speaker who presented background information on the topic and its problems and issues. The presentations were followed by group discussions. No small breakout groups were used because it was important for everyone to hear the comments from speakers, panelists, and audience. The by-product of the symposium was a better working relationship among all interested parties.

To achieve balance, speakers, panelists, and participants were selected from all levels of government (federal, state, and local), non-profit organizations and private professionals, and a wide range of disciplines since disaster management is a multi-disciplinary field at all levels and segments of our society. Although the majority of participants were from California, the remainder had good geographic distribution. Federal agencies, State Historic Preservation Offices, and Certified Local Governments were well represented. Representatives from three foreign governments also attended.

The participants included both the people who delivered aid and assistance (physical, emotional, financial, and technical) and the public who received these services and funds. The presentations and panel responses were thought-provoking and the discussions were lively. No one was bashful about presenting opposing points of view. The diversity of viewpoints was very enlightening. The symposium was limited to about 60 participants to ensure that there would be the opportunity for a good dialogue and that the symposium would not turn into a conference.

The video tapes have been edited by David Look and Stead Craigo, Historical Architect, California Office of Historic Preservation, and are now available for loan from that office.

Speakers and panelists were requested to send NPS their comments for publication. Seventeen papers have been edited by Mr. Look and Dirk H.R. Spennemann, Ph.D., sent to each participant, and placed on the World Wide Web (WWW) by the Johnstone Centre for Parks, Recreation, and Heritage, Charles Sturt University, Albury, New South Wales, Australia. As additional participants send us their comments, they will be edited, distributed, and made available to all on the WWW. Access to the papers is through the conference server at:

http://life.csu.edu.au/~dspennem/Disaster_SFO/SFO_Symposium.html.

The following offices and institutions co-sponsored the symposium: American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works; the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services; the Building Seismic Safety Council, National Institute of Building Sciences; the California Office of Historic Preservation; the Hazard Mitigation Office, California Governor's Office of Emergency Services; the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); the Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage; the Historic Preservation Partners for Earthquake Response; the Johnstone Centre of Parks,

Recreation and Heritage, Charles Sturt University; the Los Angeles Conservancy; the Missouri Historic Preservation Program; the National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property; the National Trust for Historic Preservation; the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office; the Society for Historical Archaeology; Technology and Conservation Magazine; the U.S. Small Business Administration; the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation; and the Western Chapter of the Association for Preservation Technology. Many of the co-sponsors contributed materials for the registration packet.